

**To:** Purchia, Liz[Purchia.Liz@epa.gov]  
**From:** Wakana, Benjamin (OS/ASPA)  
**Sent:** Thur 8/13/2015 5:36:55 PM  
**Subject:** RE: From HHS: Quick Favor on Gold Branch Mine

Thanks Liz. Very helpful.

**From:** Purchia, Liz [mailto:Purchia.Liz@epa.gov]  
**Sent:** Thursday, August 13, 2015 1:15 PM  
**To:** Wakana, Benjamin (OS/ASPA); Harrison, Melissa  
**Subject:** RE: From HHS: Quick Favor on Gold Branch Mine

This is a tragic and unfortunate incident, and EPA is taking responsibility to ensure that it is cleaned up. The most important thing throughout this is ensuring the health and safety of the residents and visitors near the river. We are committed to helping the people throughout the Four Corner Regions who rely on these rivers for their drinking water, irrigation water and recreation. We know how important it is to them.

As you may not know, there are thousands of abandoned mines throughout the West, and EPA routinely works with states to clean up these sites. The spill occurred when one of our contracting teams was using heavy equipment to enter the Gold King Mine, an inactive mine north of Durango, to begin the process of pumping and treating the contaminated water inside. In response to this unfortunate accident, we have deployed the full depth and breadth of the agency, with other partner agencies assisting.

It takes times to review and analyze data, but we have our researchers and scientists working around the clock. Our commitment is to get this right and protect public health. Thankfully, there have been no reported cases of anyone's health being harmed. Additionally, from initial sampling results, as the plume has advanced seeing elevated levels, and as it moves on, we are seeing a downward trajectory toward pre-event conditions.

EPA has taken steps to capture and treat the discharge at the Gold King mine, addressing the risk of additional downstream impacts. We have constructed four ponds at the mine site which are treating water by lowering acidity levels and removing dissolved metals.

We have also stood up a Unified Command center in Durango, as well as the Emergency Operations Center at EPA headquarters in DC to ensure a seamless coordinated response in conjunction with local, state and federal officials. Working with local officials, EPA is providing alternative water supplies and free water quality testing for domestic drinking water wells along the river. We have been in touch with the state leadership, as well as the Congressional delegations, and we have kept the White House informed.

EPA is an agency whose core mission is ensuring a clean environment and protecting public health, so it pains me to see this happening. But we are working tirelessly to respond and have committed to a full review of exactly what happened to ensure it cannot happen again.

**From:** Wakana, Benjamin (OS/ASPA) [<mailto:Benjamin.Wakana@hhs.gov>]  
**Sent:** Thursday, August 13, 2015 1:13 PM  
**To:** Harrison, Melissa  
**Cc:** Purchia, Liz  
**Subject:** RE: From HHS: Quick Favor on Gold Branch Mine

+Liz.

**From:** Wakana, Benjamin (OS/ASPA)  
**Sent:** Thursday, August 13, 2015 1:12 PM  
**To:** 'harrison.melissa@epa.gov'  
**Subject:** From HHS: Quick Favor on Gold Branch Mine

Hi Melissa,

Ben Wakana here- I'm the Press Secretary for HHS.

Secretary Burwell is traveling to Utah today and is doing a few local interviews. News that Governor Gary Herbert issued a state of emergency on Wednesday in response to the Gold King Mine release is dominating the news here today. I'm wondering if you can send me 1 or 2 points that Secretary Burwell should deliver if she's asked about the federal government's response?

## Deliberative Process/Ex. 5

**Ben Wakana**

Press Secretary

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

(o) 202-260-6946

(c) 202-595-4457